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A
LETTER

TO A
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT,

FROM A
Land Owner,

ON THE PROPOSED
LINE OF CANAL

FROM

BRAUNSTON TO BRENTFORD.



LONDON:

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1793.

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LETTER, &c.

MY DEAR SIR!

IF I were not as sensible of your kindness, as I am of your candour and liberality, I should not have ventured to intrude upon you at a season, when public duties demand so much of your time, as to leave you but few moments for other considerations. Of the attention paid to your kind recommendation, I have not been regularly informed; I have, nevertheless, reason

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to believe, that it was disregarded, and a different plan adopted. There are, as you well know, numberless characters who prefer a crooked path to the straight way, and no soil is more fertile in the production of this species of character, than that where Canal Navigations abound. Mark the course generally taken on these occasions, and you will need no further information concerning them. There are characters also, who think their importance would diminish, if they condescended to tread in any track prescribed or recommended by others. No road, in the opinion of this sort of man, is safe, but one of his own contriving. If the purpose be but answered, it signifies but little with him what means are employed. The undertaking is a noble one, and if the proper objects of it are considered,

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of which, however, I entertain no common apprehension, it will undoubtedly prove a great public work, and, as such, has my warmest wishes. You must perceive, that I allude to the Canal from Braunston to London. I heartily wish it was not to be conducted by the way of Brentford; but this, I am told, cannot be avoided. I have heard, however, of so many artifices and contrivances in undertakings of this kind, that such a general assertion does not satisfy my mind, nor prevent me from entertaining an opinion that it might be avoided; and I scruple not to say, that if it can, it ought. At the same time, I acknowledge myself incompetent to judge of the practicability of any other track. But this is not all—

Sensible men of some knowledge and experience in matters of this kind,

think it unnecessary to go to Brentford. Be this, however, as it may, it seems at least to have been unnecessary to take a circuitous course round Uxbridge. To embrace the trade and business of populous towns, situated within convenient distances, is certainly an object worthy attention in all these undertakings; but this should be effected, not by diverting the main Navigation from its direct course, by which an unnecessary burthen will be laid on every commodity (and of *Coals* among the rest, upon which much stress is deservedly laid,) that is carried over this circuitous track, but by collateral Cuts branching out of the main Canal, at such points as will form the most easy and direct communication with those places which are the objects of them. Crooked paths are chosen by different men, from different motives;

motives; some from pride, and others from ignorance. In Canal Navigations, interest is the predominant incentive. The longer the line, the more the revenue. Here lies the secret; and, whilst the Legislature permits Subscribers to obtain laws to empower them to do *what they please*, and to divide, amongst themselves, all they are permitted to raise upon the public, it is no wonder that the public interest is made, by these circuitous arrangements, subservient to private advantage. Limit their dividends, and we may then send our goods, and receive our necessaries, by the nearest road, and at the least expence. How it happens that the generality of mankind, but especially men in the trading and manufacturing branches, do not see, and attempt to prevent such gross impositions, is one amongst the many daily occurrences

occurrences which reason and common
 sense are at a loss to reconcile. As a
 great public work, this projected Canal
 claims the attention of all who are well-
 wishers to trade and manufactures, and
 to the general prosperity of our country,
 to which they so essentially contribute.
 As a Member of the Legislature, you,
 Sir, are called upon to support the
 measure; but, at the same time, to
 guard it by such wholesome provisions,
 regulations, and restrictions, as effectually
 to secure it from being diverted
 from the pure channel of public good,
 into the foul current of private interest.
 I believe there is not yet a Canal in the
 kingdom, of which it may not truly be
 said, that private interest was the first,
 and public good the last object of the
 zeal and activity employed in producing
 it. By private interest, I mean that
 emolument

emolument which is, unfairly, derived from an oppressive, unnecessary Tax on the public, for the purpose of increasing the wealth of individuals, who have no claim whatever to the gratitude of the public.

I have long thought, that the Legislature should interfere, and check this sort of gambling with public undertakings, to the public detriment. A moment's consideration is sufficient to discern the impropriety of giving the sanction of Parliament to such measures. To bring the question home to your feelings, I will ask, what you would think, if a set of Adventurers, without your permission, or even giving you, directly or indirectly, any kind of notice, should employ an Engineer, with his assistants, to enter your estate, and

and go any where, and every where, over your premises, trampling down your own or your tenants crops, and breaking your fences, to make observations, take levels, and do whatever they may please; and then give notice, that a certain description of persons, in which you (who are so nearly interested) are not included, will hold a Meeting, to consider of the means to be adopted preparatory to an application to Parliament, in order to obtain powers to cut a Navigation through your property, and to do a great many other things injurious to it. In consequence of this declaration, they meet, consult, subscribe, but take no notice of you, whose estate they mean to carve and mangle, and whom, by a law *to be* obtained, they propose *to compel* to sell *to them* such parts, as they may pretend

pretend to think are necessary or convenient for their purposes. If, when the opportunity arrives, you produce your objections, you are told, that the measure intended is for the public good, and that your private conveniences, comforts, and interests, must yield to public considerations: that, for what you may be compelled to sell, as well as for all damages you may sustain, an adequate price will be paid; and that, besides, you will derive numberless benefits from the good things that will flow in upon you in consequence of their public spirited project. To yield to public good, on conviction that public good will be the certain effect, is the characteristic of a patriotic mind. As to *their* public spirit, and the benefits consequent thereupon, you would probably

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claim the privilege of judging for yourself, But if, upon an examination of circumstances, you discovered, what it is impossible should escape you, that public good was the last thing in the thoughts of these projectors, and their own private emolument their first and only motive, would you not think it incumbent on you to apply to the Legislature of your Country, and to say—Hearken not to these men, who, under the mask of public good, are aiming only to procure improper advantages to themselves. For the sake of justice, let them not be authorised to enter my estate at their discretion, to invade my property, to disturb my peace, nor impower them to compel me to sell to them, against my opinion and inclination, and without either controul or enquiry, such parts of my property, as they,

they, for their own fordid emolument, may think fit to take; and to cut, mangle, and deface the rest in a thousand ways, that may be not only unpleasant and inconvenient, but injurious to my interest; nor to invest men, who are playing an artful, selfish game, in order to swell their hundreds to thousands, with those powers which are to last to the end of time; and, whenever interest or caprice may direct, are to be exercised to the inconvenience and injury of me and of my posterity for ever? —O!—But all this is for the public good, and the public good must always be consulted. Let this be done fully and effectually, and I am satisfied. I will admit, that under proper regulations, limitations, and restrictions, the undertaking promises great public advantages. I will admit, that on the plan

proposed, bad as it is, the public will derive *some* benefits. What then? The public is most undoubtedly intitled to *all* the benefits, beyond the line of reasonable compensation to adventurers of public undertakings? Because the public is to have a share, and possibly a small *share only*, in the business, is it fit that I or any other man must be forced, against our wills, to sell a property dear and valuable to us from a variety of considerations, from its vicinity to our respective residence, from the health, pleasure, and profit, which we derive from the occupation of it, but in an especial manner, from its being an expectance that has been handed down to us by a train of honorable ancestors, for many generations? Is it fit, that the very men who are *chiefly* to be benefited, and with whom gain, without industry or application,

cation, is the ruling principle, should be incorporated, by an especial law for the purpose, and armed with powers, such as can hardly be trusted with safety, to the most disinterested characters? Let the public receive the benefits that flow from public projects, and let the powers necessary to give the fullest effect to such undertakings, be lodged in the hands of men, who in every case will stand fairly and uprightly as mediators and arbitors, dispensing strict and impartial justice between parties whose interests may be at variance, and I will then, as I ought, for an adequate compensation, give up such parts of my property, and submit to such unavoidable injuries, as the execution and future maintenance of the works may require; and, though my conveniencies and comforts may be trenched upon,

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for the sake of public good and the prosperity of my country, I will cheerfully submit to a diminution of those desirable objects of life :—But, I cannot agree, and I trust the Legislature in its justice will not compel me, to bear the injuries I have stated, and much more which I may expect ; or that an untrouled power to invade my estate shall be vested in men, who have not, who cannot have on the present plan any other view, but to fatten on those Revenues which are the rightful property of the Public.

When you have weighed in your mind, if you can find leisure to do it, the considerations I here present to your attention, I shall think myself seriously obliged to you to honor me with your sentiments, and to inform me whether
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you think it consistent with justice and policy, that men, *deeply interested*, and whose interests are in direct opposition to the interests of every other Member of the Community, without one exception, (for whatever they gain is lost to the public) should be entitled to a law for the purpose of giving them powers to invade private properties, in a way injurious to the owners and occupiers, and, at their option, to force a sale of whatever they may be disposed to think will accord to their interested purposes. Let it not for a moment be thought that their pursuits are disinterested, and directed only to the welfare of the public. Take but the trouble to look into the newspapers, and read the advertisements of the games that are playing with public undertakings, and you will see what, I conceive, you will think deserves the most

most serious animadversion. Shares of £. 100 each in the grand Junction Canal are advertised at a premium of Fifty Guineas (They have even been sold at a premium of £. 60) *before* an Act is passed, and *before* it is known whether an Act will pass; and the same game, as will appear by those advertisements, is playing in not fewer than twenty similar projects. The sums subscribed to the Braunston Canal amount to somewhere about £. 360,000, besides £. 100,000 reserved for the Land Owners, as a plaister for the wound they had received by being neglected, unnoticed, and unconsulted, at which some of them felt sore. These sums together make £. 460,000. I am aware the Estimate for accomplishing this work does not amount to so much, though I have every reason to believe that it will employ the whole,

whole, and perhaps more: but for the sake of an even and easy reckoning, I will state the amount to be £. 400,000. This sum, at the premium of £. 60 upon every £. 100, holds out a profit, *even before the Act has passed*, of £. 240,000. To somebody this sum is lost. But what will be the state of things when the Act has passed, if no restrictions or limitations are introduced? If the *chance only* of its success, whilst in embryo, is worth £. 60 upon a £. 100, should the Act actually pass in its present shape, there is little doubt but every share of £. 100 will sell for £. 500; and what must be the tax upon the Public for this increase? You can well judge. It is obvious, that instead of a real expence of £. 400,000, an artificial expence will be created, operating in every respect as a real one, to an amount of no less

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than £. 2,000,000; the interest of which must be paid by the Public in the Tonnage of the Goods that are moved upon this Navigation, or the Purchasers of Shares suffer in proportion to the deficiency. You may be assured this calculation is far from being exaggerated, nor will it be matter of wonder, if even this computation, high as it may appear to you, should be doubled, or even trebled. The consequences of other projects of this kind, in other situations of the kingdom, warrant the expectation. In this consideration, can you think otherwise than with me, that it is high time the Legislature should interfere, and put these undertakings upon some more equitable footing than hath yet taken place? The Braunston Canal affords a fair opportunity to begin with, and a retrospect to many others, out of which

which there are men, who *boast* of benefits to the tune of £. 30,000, and £. 40,000, may not be wholly unworthy consideration, to exemplify the necessity of an improved system. If the Minister, for the purposes of easing the burthens likely to be incurred by War, which, though ruinous, generally afford a harvest to Inland Navigations, should not think them fair objects of Taxation, there are men who will be agreeably disappointed.

I am aware it will be urged, that the powers usually vested in Canal Companies, are not dangerous or improper, and that every man, whose property suffers, will be entitled to a satisfaction which is to be adjusted by Commissioners. I ask, why is not the whole conduct placed in Commissioners? And

where is the material difference between Navigable Canals and Turnpike Roads? Why are undertakers, in the one instance, to divide at the public expence 10, 20, 30, perhaps 40 per Cent.; and creditors, in the other, to be satisfied with only 4 1-half, or, at most, 5 per Cent.? With respect to Commissioners, I understand that every man in the Five Counties, through which this Canal is proposed to pass, possessed of some certain qualification in real or personal property, is to be a Commissioner. What the amount of the qualification is meant to be, I am not informed; but this by no means appears to me competent to the attainment of substantial justice.

We know, by fatal and long experience, how liable mankind is to improper

per bias. We know, that on occasions of importance to parties, Canal Commissioners have been canvassed with all the zeal and eagerness that attends contested elections ; and we think that this is not the right way to appoint Commissioners for deciding upon matters of such importance. Commissioners should be appointed by name and description, and should be men of the first character for judgment, integrity, and honour, and of condition independent, and out of the reach of every description of bias. What part you may take in this question, or whether any, I am perfectly ignorant, and have submitted these considerations to you, purely from my knowledge of your independence and disinterestedness, and of that bent in your mind, which directs every act of your life to the good
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of mankind. To stem the prevalence of precedents in Parliament may be an arduous task, and yet I should hope there are in that body disinterestedness and patriotism enough to induce the adjustment of such public and very important questions, in the way which the public welfare requires. But if the old, though improper, forms must be adhered to, and interested Subscribers must be called by the name of Proprietors, and must be incorporated and invested with powers to do mischief to serve themselves, and gain riches out of the public's purses : if all this must be submitted to, and their teeth cannot be drawn, I hope your assistance will be afforded to pare their nails, and blunt their talons, that such wholesome restraints and provisions may be introduced into the Act, as not to leave the

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Land-Owners and Occupiers at their mercy, in the absolute choice of what they want or may choose to do. These men are taking wonderful pains; and there are amongst them some, who have already pretty sufficiently feathered their nests by a traffic in Braunston Navigation Stock, even before it has an atom of solidity in Law ; which, if the Public was not dead to its own welfare, could not for a moment be tolerated. But who takes care of the Public? Surely this is the province of the Legislature, who, it is devoutly to be wished, may so far attend to the public welfare, as on these occasions to appoint an intermediate set of men to judge what is proper to be done, and not let these men have the power to dig and cut up my lands just how, and when,

when, and where they please, and make Roads, dig Clay for Bricks, Stones for Lime or Building, Sand, Gravel, &c. till they leave me not an atom of materials for my own use ; and to make up the measure of my discomfort, to set Brick Kilns and Lime Kilns a burning in the face of my doors, or my windows, so that I can neither sip my tea, eat my dinner, or sit down in my closet to write to you, without being liable to be poisoned with the stench, and suffocated with the smoke. The field is wide, and admits of a great deal more to be said, but I must not longer intrude on your time and patience. What I may have further to say, I will defer to another opportunity, or till I have the pleasure to see you. One thing, however, I must not omit to impress on your mind—

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It is this—That a *Limitation of Dividend on the Subscriptions to the Braunston Canal*, is both just and necessary. Pardon the trouble I have given you, and accept the faithful and respectful regard of,

DEAR SIR,

Your obliged,

Humble Servant,

A LAND OWNER.

POSTSCRIPT.

AN original capital of £. 400,000, bearing a premium of 50 per Cent. affords a profit of £. 200,000, by which the capital is swelled to £. 600,000, and requires, to discharge the interest of it, Tolls to be paid to the amount of *one-third* more, than would have been necessary to satisfy the interest of the original £. 400,000. If the original capital should bear a premium of £. 100 per Cent. it will then be increased to £. 800,000; and the Tolls to be paid to satisfy the interest of this increased amount,

amount, it is obvious, must be double to what would be necessary to pay the interest of the original Subscription or capital; i. e. if the tonnage is fixed at 1 d. per mile, and, upon that rate of tonnage, this premium is warranted, it is evident the Public is oppressed with a Tax *double* to what, in justice, it ought to be; and this injustice or oppression will be increased, in proportion to the prosperity of the project; as is actually the case in many Canal Navigations. For an instance, look at the Trent and Mersey, or Grand Trunk Canal. The original Shares were £. 200 each. The Current Price at this time is £. 1000 each, or a premium of £. 800 upon £. 200, and the trade of the country is now groaning under an oppression of Taxation, amounting to 2s. in every 2s. 6d.; or, in other words, 2s. 6d. is

paid for the same quantity of goods, which, in case this great premium had not prevailed, would only have required 6d. It seems unnecessary to add any further argument, to manifest the imposition and oppression which the Public suffers.

| When the 3 per Cents are | | | £. | s. | d. |
|---|-----|-----|----|----|----|
| At 93, a Fund yielding 5 per Cent. is worth | 155 | 0 | 0 | | |
| 90, | 150 | 0 | 0 | | |
| 85, | 5½ | 153 | 16 | 8 | |
| 80, | 6 | 160 | 0 | 0 | |
| 75 | 6½ | 162 | 10 | 0 | |
| 70, | 7 | 163 | 6 | 8 | |
| 65, | 7½ | 162 | 10 | 0 | |
| 60, | 8 | 160 | 0 | 0 | |

Provided the securities are equally eligible.

But it seems to be a prevailing opinion, that if temptations of great gain were not held out, Adventurers would

would not be found to engage in, nor Projectors to scheme out works of public utility; and that many useful and ingenious undertakings would be lost to the Public, if such prospects did not call them forth. This, to a certain degree, may be just; but it ought to be confined within moderate and reasonable limits. The ingenious Projector seems out of the question—he seldom gets too much by public works. The Adventurer, without limits, is the mischievous man, if we consider to what lengths the argument will go. The primary Subscriber to the Braunston Canal, for instance, for 10 Shares, or £. 1000 Navigation Stock, in three months afterwards sells and transfers his 10 Shares for a premium of £. 500. This is his reward for becoming an Adventurer in a public project, to which,
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by the doctrine in question, he was intitled; and here ends his public spirit. The Purchaser under him is then an Adventurer, to the amount of £. 1500, and the risque being increased in proportion as the Capital Stock is advanced, he seems intitled to at least as good a premium as his predecessor, in which case his profit would be £. 750, and the Capital Stock would then be increased from £. 1000, to £. 2,250, and by the same rule, might still increase to &c. &c.

It would seem, on serious consideration, that a limitation of dividend should be established, and understood at the outset of all these projects. Those who were disposed to subscribe, would then know the extent to which their hopes and prospects could go, and could form some tolerably accurate judgment thereupon.

upon. Then subscriptions should be offered (limiting, or not, as might be thought necessary, the quantity any one Subscriber should take) to the best bidders, and security, in some proper way, should be taken from each Subscriber for the due payment of the calls, as they shall be made. By this means, men without property would be excluded, as they ought; because, should any disastrous event reduce the stock below par, such men could not make good their payments, and the work must be at a stand.

From the foregoing Premises, the following Observations are submitted to your attention:

That high premiums upon Canal Undertakings are greatly injurious to the
Public,

Public, as well as the Tradesman and Manufacturer, and produce advantages to men who have no claim to such benefits, in any degree whatever beyond the fair reasonable gain of honest adventure, such as the fair lender would think a sufficient return for the money he should advance, with the risque attending it, upon a fair calculation. An Usurer, in the private concerns of life, is an obnoxious character, and so universally reprobated, that the laws have interfered to prevent the mischiefs of usurious practices, and have laid heavy penalties on those who exercise them. Are then public plunderers to be cherished? And is Parliament to sanction abuses more serious in their consequences, and, in a general point of view, more important than practices by which individuals only can suffer?

That

That powers committed to men, who are interested in the event, of doing what may be, nay, what positively will be, injurious to others, whose properties ought to be protected, and who have much stronger claims to protection, than any Adventurers in such cases can possibly have to Parliamentary support, are contrary to justice and sound policy.

That all powers necessary for the execution of undertakings of this kind, should be vested in men only who have not, and cannot have, an interest in the event; for, upon any other principle, injustice must and will be the consequence.

That, when Imposts upon Trade and Manufactures are increased in the proportion of five to one, or, when 2s. 6d.

is paid for that for which 6% only would have been adequate; the public, who are thereby oppressed to the amount of 400 per Cent. are justified in expecting that relief, and prevention from further oppression, which the Legislature only can give.

FINIS.

